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BERLIN CONFERENCE DEVELOPMENTS - I

Molotov makes his opening statement at Berlin conference:
Foreign Minister Molotov's opening statement indicated very little change in the negative tone and content of the Soviet position. While significantly new proposals might not be expected so early in the conference, the uncompromising spirit of this introduction suggests that major policy changes are unlikely.

Molotov raised the possibility of a prolonged dispute over the order of agenda by insisting that first priority be assigned to the convening of a subsequent five-power conference. It is unlikely, however, that he will let the conference break down by demanding that this be agreed to before any further discussions. Molotov suggested two primary subjects for five-power talks: the armaments race and the Korean question.

As the second agenda item he proposed the German question and the problem of insuring European security. During this discussion, Molotov is expected to raise such questions as EDC and American bases.

Molotov's proposal of the Austrian state treaty as the third item is the first explicit official Soviet statement that this issue should be discussed at Berlin. Molotov suggested that the treaty be based on the existing agreements, foreshadowing Soviet opposition to any alleviation of the harsh economic terms of Article 35. His demand that Austria be independent and not again become the tool of German militarism indicates that he may insist on a neutrality clause in the treaty. Molotov made no reference to the frequent Soviet assertion that a German settlement would facilitate agreement to an Austrian treaty.

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Security precautions for the Berlin Conference: Soviet and East German official fears of popular manifestations against the regime are reflected by the elaborate security precautions which characterize their preparations for the conference. On 21 January a ten-day ban was announced on the sale of railway tickets from points in East Germany to Berlin, and since 20 January the Soviet sector has been patrolled constantly by 23 two-man patrols who have the special mission of observing activities in the areas of public buildings, railroad stations, stores, cafes, movie theaters, and factories.

As additional measures, all students in East German police technical schools have been released for temporary assignment to East Berlin and an estimated 50 to 70 plain-clothes Criminal Police are to be brought in from other parts of East Germany. The police are organizing special staffs to direct operations within their areas of responsibility and each precinct will be assigned a disguised radio car carrying three men. Police have been observed practicing special security measures around the Soviet embassy in East Berlin. Along the sector borders between East and West Berlin, police have exchanged their carbines for pistols and clubs; no change in armaments has been observed along the other borders, however, nor have any roadblocks along any of the Berlin borders been removed.

Grotewohl allegedly hints at closing of zonal border if conference fails: Premier Grotewohl told an Evangelical Church leader on 20 January that a planned annual congress in Leipzig in July could not be held due to "uncertainty in the political situation," according to a church press release. He explained that an unfavorable outcome of the four-power conference would result in the reclosing of the zonal border, making travel to the church congress impossible.

British attitudes on the Berlin conference: British opinion is generally skeptical about the chances of the Berlin meeting reducing East-West tensions. At the same time, the meeting is not expected to lead to any new crises. The protracted preliminary talks have been sharply criticized, but American initiative in proposing concessions has been lauded as another indication that Western representatives wish to negotiate with both patience and flexibility.

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According to the American embassy in London, Foreign Office attitudes reflect resignation or exasperation at the useless work involved. Most Labor Party officials have been silent about the conference, but left-wing elements stand ready to blame the United States for the expected failure of the meeting. Responsible and influential newspapers such as The Times and the Manchester Guardian expect the conference to be long, unprofitable, and indecisive.

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